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Institutional research (IR), defined as inquiry "directed toward data useful or necessary [for] intelligent decisions and/or for the successful maintenance, operation and/or improvement of a given collegiate institution," can be directly applied to soaring enrollment, greater administrative complexity, rising costs. The junior college administrator who rejects IR because he thinks it abstract does his school and the taxpayer a disservice. A college without IR (1) deprives the transfer student of the research orientation the native has already encountered, (2) cannot easily recruit faculty with the usual attitude to research, (3) will dimish its academic reputation. Each college undertakes different IR, to fit its own role and staff. IR may be basic or applied, usually the latter, stressing current operational problems and, although its value is acknowledged, it has not had a major impact on higher education thought. IR functions have been described as (1) motivating and initiating experiment, (2) evaluating results, (3) long range planning; or as (1) providing data for decision making, (2) evaluating line operations, (3) serving both faculty and administration. The value of advisory groups and theoretical vs. applied IR are discussed. The 1968 survey of IR by Roueche and Boggs (ED 021 557) is examined in detail. In summary, IR must be planned, have centralized responsibility, report to the president, have advisory committees, include staff and administration, and be adequately financed. (HH)

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# WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH?

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INFORMATION

# INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

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It seems only logical that we begin with a definition of institutional research. Stickler (17) provides one of the most widely quoted definitions. He defines institutional research as "that which is directed toward providing data useful or necessary in the making of intelligent decisions and/or for the successful maintenance, operation, and/or improvement of a given collegiate institution". Note that this definition does not direct itself to a single entity such as the faculty or the administration, but rather, it can be applied to both.

Why do we need institutional research? As indicated above, institutional research facilitates decision-making by providing data on possible alternatives. Brumbaugh (3) says that in the area of higher education we need institutional research for three immediate reasons; soaring enrollments, increasing complexity of administrative functions, and rising costs. Anderson (1) takes a hard line on the need for institutional research in today's junior college and states that the administrator who expresses the attitude that research has no place in the junior college is committing two major errors. One, he misunderstands research. He may think research is that which deals with abstractions, when all research really boils down to is being problem centered. Two, he is doing a disservice to his institution and ultimately to the taxpayers who support it. Anderson believes that this line of reasoning is supported by the following: one, in an institution devoid of research the transfer student will not be exposed to the research orientation to which his counterpart, the senior institution "native", is accustomed; two, faculty cannot be as actively recruited from graduate schools where they have come to accept the research function; and third, the reputation of the institution will suffer.

## History and Development

Institutional research in American higher education has deep roots. It goes back to 1701 when Increase Mather, then president of Harvard, acted as an educational consultant to the founders of Yale.

During the first two or three hundred years of higher education in America, colleges and universities did very little in the way of studying their own operations and problems. In general, institutions were small and operations were relatively simple. As one university president (Doak Campbell) put it, "In those days institutions of higher learning could fly by the seat of their pants." As we think of it today, however, institutional research is largely a post World War II phenomenon that got its big boost from the sudden rise in the student population and the sudden availability of foundation money for institutional self-studies.

I think it can be safely said that no two colleges follow the same pattern for institutional research operation, for the nature and role of the institution, not to mention the personality factors involved, necessitate

wide variability. Generally speaking, institutional research is too big a job for one person or one office to do alone. Other offices (business, registrar, etc.) produce data that are potentially useful in institutional decision-making. It is not always the enormity of the task, however, but often the special skills and competencies required, that are involved.

At the junior college level, we find that one of the first colleges to conduct institutional research was Stephens College. Stephens has had an organized institutional research program in effect for over forty-five years and has produced about 2,000 research reports, a portion of which have been completed during the tenure of such persons as W. W. Charters and B. Lamar Johnson.

Institutional research may be either basic or applied. In practice it is usually applied; it deals primarily with the ongoing operational problems of the institution. Institutional research has begun to develop a literature of its own, and it has acquired a new professional organization, The Association for Institutional Research, which currently numbers over 200 members.

In regard to its present status, Mayhew (12) states that institutional research has arrived. It has produced a wide variety of techniques, tests, equations, accounting procedures, computer applications, etc., but it has not made a major impact on the main course of thinking about higher education. It seems that there is a lag. Why? We may look at the situation in this light--Institutions of higher learning are basically conservative. The almost religious convictions of many of our faculty members concerning the superiority of small classes (tracable to 300 A.D.), the faculty-student ratio as a measure of institutional quality, the necessity of regular class attendance, and other time honored beliefs serve as examples of the great folklore of the citadels of learning. It is as Kerr (8) has said, institutions of higher learning are so conservative about their own affairs while their members are so liberal about the affairs of others.

## Role of Institutional Research

Many people have attempted to delimit just what functions I-R (institutional research) should achieve. Baskin (2) sets the following framework for the I-R worker:

- He must be the motivating force in initiating experimentation and research.
- He should have an assessment or evaluation function as well as a research function, that is, he must do more than just stir up trouble (in some quarters he is referred to as the vice-president in charge of heresy).
- He must be willing to aid in long-range planning and projection.

Carl Wedekind (21) also puts I-R in its place, so to speak. He attempts to place I-R in institutional policy implementation. He says I-R:

- is a staff function, not a decision-making function. It provides data on which to base decisions.

- should play a role in the evaluation of line operations in carrying out policy.
- should serve the faculty as well as the administration.

Thompson (18) ameliorates the fears aroused in those of us who are awed by the potential of I-R when he says that college presidents and faculty committees will not be displaced by I-R and planning. On the contrary, I-R and planning can exist only when created and nurtured by presidents and faculties. In the future, one of the skills needed by college leaders will be that of selecting personnel for research and planning, together with providing resources and specifying the boundaries and objectives for the work of the specialists. Once the leaders have the benefit of research and planning, their decisions will be less limited by their own experience and knowledge. They will be able to examine proposed changes with a better view of what the consequences will be. Their concept of possible consequences will be derived from careful technical studies, the application of scientific knowledge by competent professional staff.

## Advisory Groups

The following question is sometimes asked: "Other than being a staff function, how can the I-R agency articulate its potential?" The answer may be an advisory group. Some I-R offices have found it useful to have a faculty advisory committee to use as a sounding board. While the composition and legal status of such a committee are crucial to its effective functioning, it may serve the following purposes:

- To assist the director in establishing priorities for the efforts of the office
- To suggest possible areas of inquiry
- To react to ideas of the institutional researcher for possible studies
- To serve as a channel of communication between the office and the faculty at large.

## Philosophical Issues

Dyer (5) says that I-R is going through the crises of identity; it is not sure of what it is or where it is going. He finds that there is a dichotomy of thought regarding I-R and how it should be carried out. The lines of battle are drawn as follows:

> To begin with, I will borrow the terms "Rationalist" and "Realist" from Thornton (19).

Rationalist ⟵ ⟶ Realist

**Nevitt Sanford (16)**

Sanford claims that what is needed is <u>theoretically</u> oriented long-term studies of educational institutions. The agency should deal in <u>pure</u> research and should be relatively <u>independent</u> of the host institution.

**John Dale Russell (15)**

Russell would like to see the I- R agency attached <u>directly</u> to the office of the president. It would work toward providing data for decision making and be primarily concerned with ways and means of <u>saving money</u>.

Dyer suggests that this dichotomy is found in I-R in all types of institutions of higher education. He believes that if I-R hopes to become a science, it will need to integrate both of these points. Either approach used by itself is going to be sterile. Problem oriented research is important, but uninformed by theory goes nowhere. Problem oriented research almost by definition pays little or no attention to the fundamental purposes of an institution or to the value systems that control it. However, I-R that is entirely theoretical may result in theories detached from institutional realities and may not be understood.

## Surveys of Institutional Research

A national survey of junior college institutional research in 1964 found that fewer than 20% of the junior colleges had formally organized programs of I-R and fewer than one-third of the colleges surveyed had plans for evaluating their research programs.

To determine the current status of I-R in the junior college, Roueche & Boggs (14) conducted a survey of I-R in the junior college for ERIC. They selected a stratified random sample of 10% of 837 institutions listed in the 1967 Junior College Directory. The following tables include data from the Roueche & Boggs study and from a comparable study by Johnson (7).

Roueche & Boggs Sample

| Group | Control and Size | No. Sampled |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Public, enrollment under 2,000 | 38 |
| 2 | Private, enrollment under 2,000 | 26 |
| 3 | Public, enrollment between 2,000-6,000 | 13 |
| 4 | Private, enrollment between 2,000-6,000 | 1 |
| 5 | Public, enrollment 6,000-10,000 | 3 |
| 6 | Public, enrollment 10,000 plus | 2 |
| | | 83 |

Here are some of the questions asked in the Roueche & Boggs survey:

1. How many I-R reports are completed annually in American junior colleges?
   The range was from 0 to 13 with a median of three and an average of 1.1 report per institution per year.

2. What educational areas are most often researched and least researched? (included are data from Johnson)

Areas Researched in Junior College Samples (Number of Studies)

| Johnson (1961) | | | Roueche & Boggs (1968) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Area | Frequency | % | Area | Frequency | % |
| Students | 48 | 43.2 | Students | 99 | 41.6 |
| Curriculum | 27 | 24.3 | Curriculum | 49 | 20.6 |
| Enrollment | 10 | 9.0 | Instructional Oper. | 40 | 16.8 |
| Faculty | 6 | 5.4 | Faculty | 21 | 8.8 |
| Admission | 6 | 5.4 | Student Personnel | 16 | 6.7 |
| Administration | 5 | 4.5 | Other | 10 | 4.2 |
| Plant | 4 | 3.6 | Instruction | 3 | 1.3 |
| Finance | 2 | 1.8 | | | |
| Articulation | 2 | 1.8 | | | |
| Teaching | 0 | .0 | | | |

It is interesting to note that while the junior college is normally characterized as a teaching institution, research in teaching and instruction is at a minimum. This phenomenon has persisted since 1961 through the current "boom" in I-R.

3. Roueche & Boggs next asked, "What educational areas would junior college administrators like to research?"

Areas Junior College Administrators Would Like to Research (Roueche & Boggs, 1968)

| Rank | Area | No. of Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students | 38 | 29.9 |
| 2 | Curriculum | 36 | 28.3 |
| 3 | Instruction | 17 | 13.4 |
| 4 | Institutional Operation | 13 | 10.2 |
| 5 | Faculty | 10 | 7.8 |
| 6 | Other | 7 | 5.5 |
| 7 | Student Personnel | 6 | 4.7 |
| | | 127 | 99.9 |

Note that the category "Instruction" jumps from last to third.

4. Who coordinates I-R at the local junior college?

| Coordinating Responsibility | Per cent of Institutions |
|---|---|
| Specialized Personnel | 22.8 |
| President, Dean or Counselor | 44.3 |
| No Regular Coordinator | 32.9 |
| | 100.0 |

For comparison, here is a similar breakdown by Johnson.

Organization for I-R in 100 Western Junior Colleges
(from Johnson, Title II, 1962)

| Type of Organization | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| Full-time coordination | 2 | 2 |
| Part-time coordination | 27 | 27 |
| Decentralized organization | 43 | 43 |
| Little I-R | 28 | 28 |
| | 100 | 100 |

It can be seen that there is no one special pattern for I-R in the junior college. It seems that Roueche & Boggs and Johnson were somewhat euphemistic in their choice of categories, since neither included a "None" category.

In Johnson's survey we find the following data which further reinforces the notion that decentralization seems to be the keyword in junior college I-R to date.

Staff Member Responsible for Maintaining
Files of Research Reports
(From Johnson, Table V, 1962)

| Staff Member | Frequency |
|---|---|
| President | 13 |
| Dean of Instruction | 11 |
| Dean of Student Personnel or a member of his staff | 9 |
| Coordinator of I-R | 5 |
| Librarian | 3 |
| Vice-President | 1 |
| Business Officer | 1 |
| Director of Educational Services | 1 |
| Public Relations Director | 1 |
| Registrar | 1 |
| Not Designated | 8 |

Johnson was also interested in the type of assistance provided by junior colleges to their researchers.

Types of Assistance 63 Junior Colleges Provide
Staff Members in Studying Problems Relating to Their Work
(From Johnson, Table IV, 1962)

| Types of Assistance | Frequency | Per cent of Junior Colleges |
|---|---|---|
| Secretarial/clerical | 39 | 61.9 |
| Released time | 20 | 31.7 |
| Technical | 19 | 30.1 |
| Materials | 10 | 15.8 |
| Financial | 8 | 12.7 |
| Use of IBM equipment | 2 | 3.2 |

The reader can draw his own conclusions concerning the state of I-R in the junior college. Keep in mind that Johnson's data is some seven years old and in spite of the fact that no significant shifts have occurred in the emphasis or concentration of study, there may be significant changes in other areas such as; organization, assistance provided, etc.

In summary, let's return to the words of the man who defined I-R for us, Hugh Stickler. He lists several principles to be used as a guide for developing I-R programs--they are:

1. I-R must be planned
2. Responsibility for direction, coordination, and review of I-R should be centralized
3. The I-R officer should report to the President
4. An institution-wide advisory committee should assist the I-R agency
5. Faculty and administrative officers should participate in planning and conducting I-R projects
6. I-R must be adequately financed (2-3% of the college budget, or $25,000 minimum for a small college on a yearly basis).

## Appendix

### Organizations Giving Attention to I-R

| | |
|---|---|
| American Association for Higher Education | (AAHE) |
| American Association of Junior Colleges | (AAJC) |
| American College Testing Program | (ACT) |
| American Council on Education | (ACE) |
| Association for Institutional Research | (AIR) |
| Commission on Colleges and Universities North Central Association | |
| College Entrance Examination Board | (CEEB) |
| Educational Testing Service | (ETS) |
| ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior College Information -- UCLA | |
| New England Board of Higher Education | |
| Office of Education, Department of Health, Education & Welfare | |
| Southern Regional Education Board | (SREB) |
| Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education | (WICHE) |

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